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ABSTRACT

This report describes the first module of the "First Steps" program, an early intervention program for at-risk kindergartners who show the early signs of antisocial behavior patterns. This module presents four options for screening and identifying kindergarten students at risk for antisocial behavior patterns. In option one, the kindergarten teacher is given a definition of antisocial behavior and asked to nominate children whose characteristic behavior patterns reflect antisocial behavior. Nominated children are then rank-ordered by the teacher according to how well their behavior matches the definition. Option two also relies upon teacher nominations and rank-ordering of at-risk students, but also requires the teacher to rate the highest ranked students on a nine-item scale. In option three, a brief, economical rating procedure is used in which the teacher rates all students in the class on a set of behavioral criteria that are strongly associated with antisocial behavior patterns. The last option uses a multiple gating procedure containing three interrelated screening stages (teacher nominations and rank ordering, teacher and parent ratings of child behavior, and direct observations) for identifying likely candidates for First Steps. Each option description is followed by detailed instructions. Appendices include relevant forms and a rating scale. (CR)

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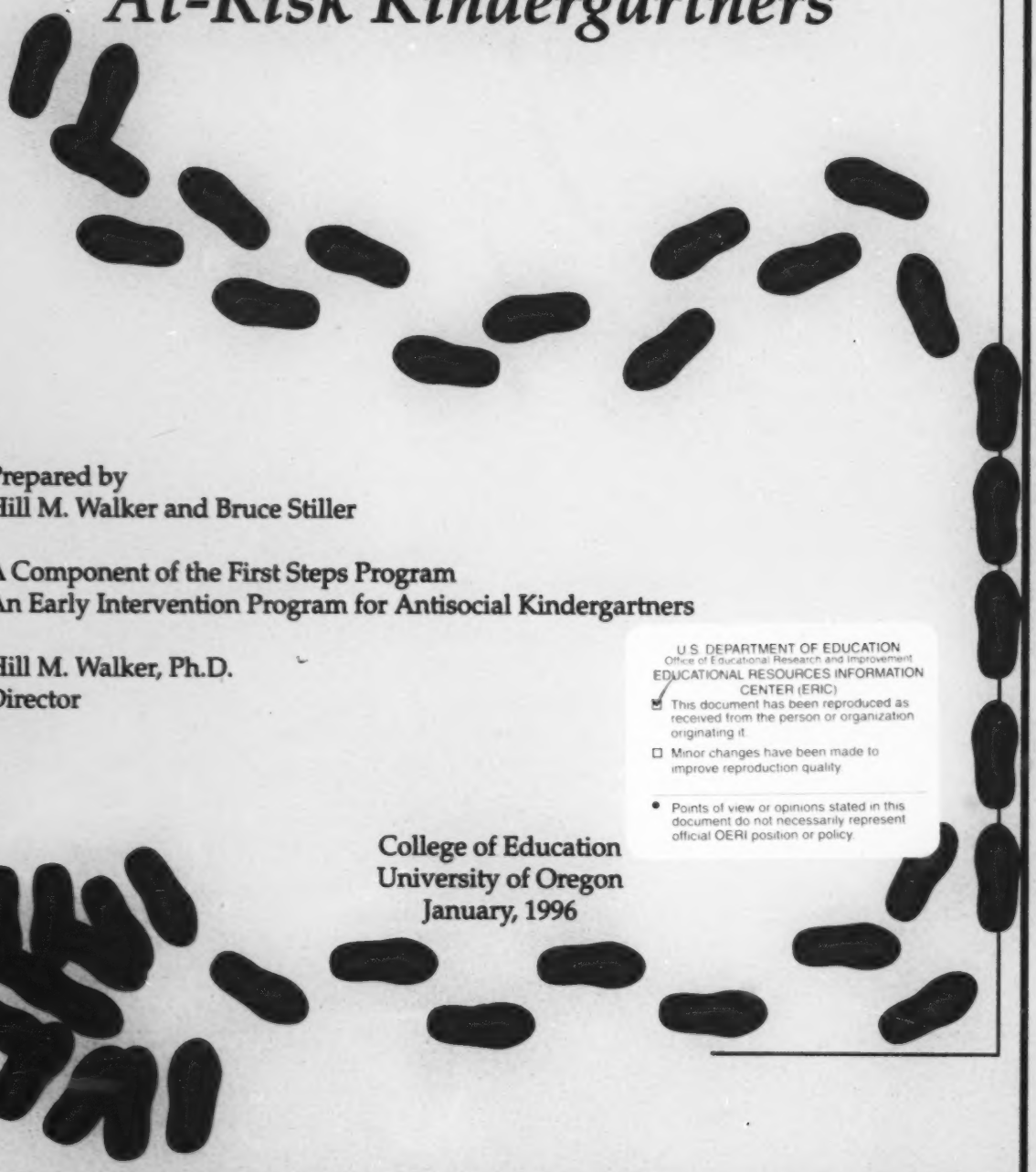
ED 407 799

First Steps Screening Module:

Procedures for Screening and Identifying At-Risk Kindergartners



Prepared by
Hill M. Walker and Bruce Stiller

A Component of the First Steps Program
An Early Intervention Program for Antisocial Kindergartners

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College of Education
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January, 1996

EC 305550

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FIRST STEPS SCREENING MODULE:

SCREENING AND IDENTIFYING FIRST STEPS STUDENTS

Prepared by: Hill Walker and Bruce Stiller

A Component of the First Steps Program

Hill Walker, Ph.D., Project Director

December 14, 1995

SCREENING AND IDENTIFYING FIRST STEPS STUDENTS

Rationale

In order to do effective early intervention for either preventive or remedial purposes, it is necessary to systematically screen and identify at risk children **early**- preferably during the preschool years. Many preschool children, particularly boys, engage in aggressive, oppositional, overly active, and pestering forms of behavior that may not seem all that serious at this developmental level. Some preschool children will outgrow this behavior pattern over time as they become socialized to the social tasks of getting along with peers, making friends and adjusting to the normal demands of schooling. However, those who come to school with this behavior pattern already established and at a more severe level of involvement are very unlikely to outgrow it. Instead, the evidence shows they grow into it and this has very serious implications for their future development and school careers (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995).

It is possible to identify children at risk for antisocial behavior patterns as young as age three as they enter preschool settings. It is very important to **proactively** screen all children in preschool settings to identify those who show the soft early signs of this behavior pattern. The **First Steps** program provides four options for screening and identifying such children at the kindergarten level. They are sequenced in order from the least to most complex. Screening options with lower levels of complexity are easier to implement but are less comprehensive and accurate then more complex systems. The details of each screening option are described below.

Screening Procedures

Option One

In this option, the kindergarten teacher is given a definition of antisocial behavior and asked to nominate children whose **characteristic** behavior pattern reflects it. Nominated children are then rank ordered by the teacher according to how well their behavior matches the definition. The highest ranked children are considered possible candidates for the **First Steps** intervention. Instructions for implementing this option are presented below.

Step One. Study the definition of antisocial behavior provided below and nominate those students in your class whose characteristic behavior patterns reflect it. Antisocial behavior refers to ...actions that deviate from accepted rules and behavioral expectations across a range of settings including the classroom and playground. Antisocial behavior includes disruptive, aggressive, non compliant and disruptive forms of behavior that are highly aversive to others.

Step Two. Carefully consider the behavioral characteristics of all students in your class before nominating individual children as antisocial. Write the names of the nominated students in the left hand column of appendix A in alphabetical order.

Step Three. Finally, rank order students on your list in appendix A according to how closely their characteristic behavior reflects the antisocial definition. That is, the student whose behavior matches the definition best receives the rank of one; the student whose behavior matches it the next best receives the rank of two and so on until all students have been rank ordered. Rank order the listed students on the right side of the form in the space provided.

The highest ranked students are likely appropriate candidates for the First Steps Program. In most cases, they would be worth the time and effort required to implement First Steps.

Option Two

This option also relies upon teacher nominations and rank-ordering of at-risk students (as described above). In addition, this option also requires the kindergarten teacher to rate the highest ranked student(s) on a nine-item scale, measuring child aggression, that is sensitive in identifying those who may be at-risk for developing antisocial behavior patterns. Instructions for implementing this screening option are described below.

Step One. Follow steps one through three as described above in Option One.

Step Two: Complete the nine item aggression subscale, contained in appendix B, on the highest ranked students in your class.

Step Three. Those rated students who receive a score of 18 or higher on this scale have high to extreme levels of risk and should be considered for First Steps.

Option Three

In this option, a brief, economical rating procedure is used in which the teacher rates all students in the class on a set of behavioral criteria that are strongly associated with and predictive of antisocial behavior patterns. Drummond (1993) has ingeniously adapted these criteria into a seven-item rating scale, called the Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS), for use by kindergarten teachers in identifying students who show the soft early signs of antisocial behavior. His research shows that these items are easy to rate, technically sound and highly effective in identifying students who prove to have later school adjustment problems due to the presence of antisocial behavior patterns. The seven items are listed below:

1. **Stealing**
2. **Lying, cheating, sneaking**
3. **Behavior problems**
4. **Peer rejection**
5. **Low academic achievement**
6. **Negative attitude**
7. **Aggressive behavior**

Figure 1 illustrates how the SRSS is used to screen an entire classroom of students. The actual SRSS screening form (see appendix C) can accommodate up to 30 students.

Figure 1. SRSS Screening Form for an Entire Class

Names	ITEMS							
	Steal	Lie, Cheat, Sneak	Behav. Prob.	Peer Reject.	Low Achieve.	Neg. Att.	Aggress. Behav.	Totals
Jamie	3	3	2	2	0	1	1	12
Susan	0	0	3	3	2	3	0	11
Fred	1	1	3	3	2	3	3	16

The names of all students in the class are listed vertically down the left side of this form. The SRSS items are displayed across the top of the form as can be seen in Figure 1. The teacher enters a rating, ranging from 0 to 3, for each student on each of the seven SRSS items. Teacher rating options are as follows: 0 = never, 1 = occasionally, 2 = sometimes and 3 = frequently. With seven items, SRSS scores can range from 0 to 21. Instructions for implementing this screening option are described below.

Step One. Using the SRSS rating form in appendix C, list the names of all kindergarten students in your class down the left side of the form.

Step Two. Evaluate each student on the seven items and enter a rating, ranging from 0 to 3, that best reflects your judgement of the frequency with which each student displays the behavior defined by each item.

Step Three. Calculate a total score on the seven items for each student in your class. Those students who receive a total score of 15 or higher on the seven SRSS items should be considered as viable candidates for the First Steps Program.

Option Four

In this option, the procedures and decision criteria of the Early Screening Project (ESP) (Walker, Severson, & Feil, 1995) are used to identify likely candidates for First Steps. This multiple gating procedure contains three, interrelated screening stages (i.e. teacher nominations and rank ordering, teacher and parent ratings of child behavior, and direct observations in classroom and playground settings). Target students exceeding cutoff scores on this instrument are very likely appropriate candidates for First Steps.

The Walker, Severson, and Feil (1994) screening procedure detects children in the 3-5 age range who are at risk for either externalizing or internalizing behavior problems. *Externalizing* adjustment problems are maladaptive forms of social behavior that are directed outwardly toward the external social environment. Behavior problems of this type violate social norms and are aversive to others. *Internalizing* behavior problems, on the other hand, usually involve skill deficits, are directed inwardly, and are associated with insufficient amounts of social behavior. Examples of externalizing behavior problems include disruption, oppositional-defiant behavior, and aggression; internalizing behavior problems are social avoidance, depression, anxiety problems, phobias, and affective disorders. This distinction captures most of the social-behavioral adjustment difficulties of children and youth during their school years. Figure 2 shows a schematic of the three sequential stages, or "gates," of the ESP screening procedure.

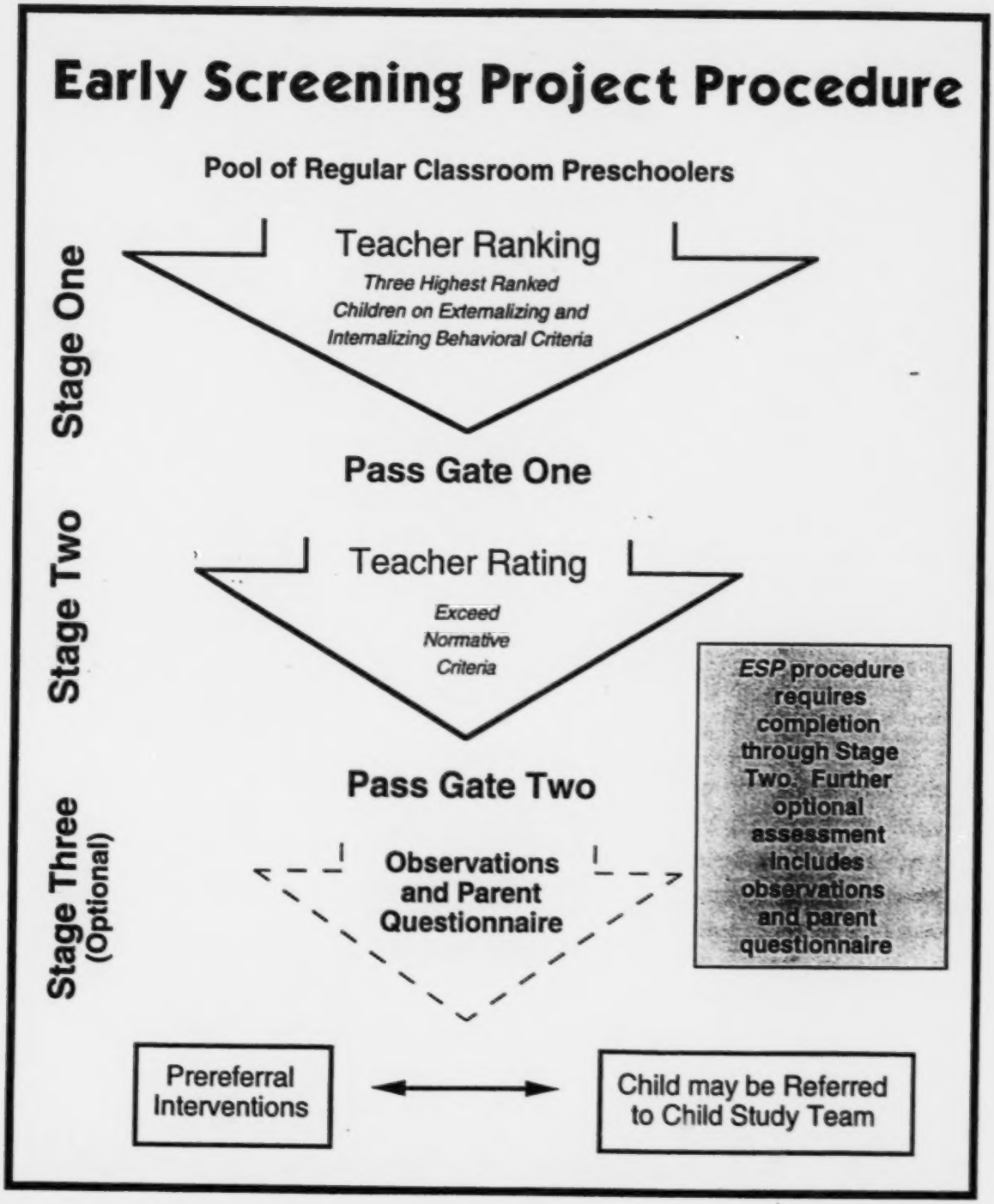
In Stage One, the regular teacher nominates and rank-orders children whose characteristic behavior patterns most closely match the externalizing or internalizing behavioral profiles. The three highest ranked externalizers and internalizers then move to Stage Two where their behavior patterns are rated on teacher checklists and rating scales that describe their behavior. Those students who exceed normative scores on Stage Two screening measures then move to Stage Three where they are directly observed in classroom and freeplay contexts. Parents are also asked to rate their child's behavioral adjustment in this stage. Kindergarten children who are at-risk for antisocial behavior patterns will usually exceed cut-off points on the externalizing path of the ESP screening procedure and will be identified in this manner.

Information about the ESP can be obtained from the publisher. The address and toll free and fax numbers of the publisher are as follows:

Sopris West, Inc.
1140 Boston Avenue
Longmont CO 80501

Toll free: (800) 547-6747 fax: (303) 776-5934

Figure 2


Early Screening Project Procedure
Pool of Regular Classroom Preschoolers
Stage One
Teacher Ranking
Three Highest Ranked Children on Externalizing and Internalizing Behavioral Criteria
Pass Gate One
Stage Two
Teacher Rating
Exceed Normative Criteria
Pass Gate Two
Stage Three (Optional)
Observations and Parent Questionnaire
ESP procedure requires completion through Stage Two. Further optional assessment includes observations and parent questionnaire
Prereferral Interventions
Child may be Referred to Child Study Team

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The ESP screening procedure, and systems like it, are highly recommended for use at preschool and early elementary levels for detecting children who are at-risk for developing antisocial behavior patterns. The ESP is a downward extension of the Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) procedure developed by Walker and Severson (1990). The SSBD is a proactive, multiple-gated screening system for use in detecting students at-risk for externalizing and internalizing problems in grades 1-6. It is highly reliable and extensive research with school populations indicates that it powerfully distinguishes at-risk and non-at-risk children based on their behavioral characteristics.

The four options described for screening and identifying kindergarten students who are at-risk for antisocial behavior patterns are all reliable, cost-efficient, and valid for the uses for which they were designed. Although the key features of these approaches differ from one another, they share a very important characteristic in being proactive rather than reactive screening systems. Each will enable early identification and each relies upon teacher judgement of student behavior in this process (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

References

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Walker, H. M., Severson, H. H., & Feil, E. G. (1995). The Early screening project: A proven child-find process. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

APPENDIX A

RANK-ORDERING FORM FOR ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Alphabetical Listing	Rank-Ordered Listing
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____

APPENDIX B

FIRST STEPS RATING SCALE

Aggressive Behavior Scale

Instructions: The numbers "1" through "5" are used to show the estimate of the frequency with which each item occurs. Circle the number that best represents the amount of times this behavior happens. Complete this scale using your knowledge of the child during the current school year.

	Never		Sometimes		Frequently
1. Has tantrums.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Physically assaults adults.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Is physically aggressive with other children or adults (hits, bites, chokes, or throws things).	1	2	3	4	5
4. Damages others' property (materials, personal possessions).	1	2	3	4	5
5. Suddenly cries or displays highly inappropriate feelings in normal situations.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ignores teacher warnings or reprimands.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Make lewd or obscene gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Uses obscene language.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Is teased, neglected, and/or avoided by peers.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Aggressive Behavior Scale _____

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APPENDIX C
SRSS SCREENING FORM

Names	ITEMS							
	Steal	Lie, Cheat, Sneak	Behav. Prob.	Peer Reject.	Low Achieve.	Neg. Att.	Aggress. Behav.	Totals
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								
13								
14								
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